Watchable Wildlife Working Group

Report to the Division Management Team

August 17, 2001

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Executive Summary

Watchable Wildlife Work Group

Introduction

The following Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Division of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) staff members were selected by the Division Management Team (DMT) as members of the Watchable Wildlife Work Group:

John Crouse, Howard Golden, Polly Hessing, Thomas McDonough, Doreen Parker McNeill (co-chair), Michelle Sydeman, Larry VanDaele (co-chair); DMT members: John Coady and Steve Schwartz.

The charge to the *Watchable Wildlife Work Group* was to identify and prioritize watchable wildlife needs and resources, outline strategies for providing them, and estimate human and monetary costs associated with providing them. The group focused on internal perspectives and recommendations (i.e., within the department), but also took into account the results of the June 27, 2001 public scoping session. We also identified additional external sources for future input where appropriate in the project statements (i.e., public individuals or non-government organizations [NGOs]).

We began by identifying internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats that may help and/or hinder our progress. Using those strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as well as recommendations from the public scoping session and referrals from the Public Service Work Group, we identified 41 issues related to watchable wildlife. We then grouped similar issues together. Keeping in mind the DWC vision, mission, guiding philosophy and values, and goals, we developed 7 goal statements based on the 5 groups of issues.

Goals for Watchable Wildlife

1. Ensure that wildlife-viewing opportunities do not adversely affect wildlife or their habitat.
2. Promote responsible wildlife viewing behavior.
3. Provide high quality information to the public to enhance their appreciation of wildlife viewing and commitment to wildlife and habitat conservation.
4. Provide a wide range of safe, educational and sustainable wildlife viewing opportunities.
5. Minimize conflicts between wildlife viewing and other wildlife users and landowners.
6. Promote wildlife viewing that is sensitive to local needs and desires.

7. Create partnerships that promote quality wildlife viewing experiences.

We recognize DWC's responsibility to be the leader in Watchable Wildlife. The welfare of wildlife and habitat is the highest priority of the Watchable Wildlife program; along with building commitment to conservation. Public education is central to attaining these goals.

Projects

Using our goal statements as guidance, we identified a list of 52 watchable wildlife projects. We attempted 3 prioritization methods before settling on a final method. We prioritized the projects by placing them into 3 funding levels: Current DWC Funding (Level I), Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) "Lite" Funding (Level II), and Full CARA Funding (Level III). These 3 funding levels are also the level of priority. Projects placed in the "Current DWC Funding" level were deemed to be so important to the Watchable Wildlife Program that they should be funded even if no new funding source is available to the division.

For each prioritized project, we developed a problem statement, possible solution, considerations, cost, staffing, and method of evaluation. See Appendix A of the Watchable Wildlife Workgroup recommendations for a complete description of each project.

The Watchable Wildlife Working Group submits the following projects to the DMT for consideration:

Level I Funding

The Level I funding category reflects the current funding situation with no additional monies. Projects A and B are the highest priorities for Watchable Wildlife funding. Other Level I projects are not listed in priority or sequential order.

A) Maintain existing Watchable Wildlife Programs (including McNeil River, Round Island, Pack Creek, and Creamer's Field).

B) Create and fund a Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator position.

C) Produce high-quality publications (both print and electronic) on responsible wildlife viewing behavior, Anchorage area wildlife viewing opportunities and Fairbanks area wildlife viewing opportunities.

D) Consider recommendations from public planning efforts that pertain to watchable wildlife (i.e. the Kenai and Kodiak Brown Bear plans and the Anchorage "Living with Wildlife" plan).

E) Explore and pursue funding and partnering opportunities with other agencies, NGO's, and corporations to coordinate and enhance watchable wildlife programs.

F) Inventory current wildlife viewing programs within the state, including those administered by other agencies and private entities.

Level II Funding

Level II funding reflects the anticipated funding situation with "CARA Lite" – approximately $2 million additional. This listing assumes continued funding for Level I projects. Projects A, B and C are the highest priorities for Watchable Wildlife funding. Other Level II projects are not listed in priority or sequential order.

A) Create and fund Regional Watchable Wildlife positions.

B) Conduct a "needs assessment" of the publics' desires for future watchable wildlife programs.

C) Enhance existing watchable wildlife programs (McNeil River, Round Island, Pack Creek, Mendenhall wetlands, Potter's Marsh, and Creamers Field).

D) Develop and implement a training program for wildlife viewing operators in coordination with the statewide and regional Watchable Wildlife staff.

E) Develop and implement research programs which investigate the immediate and long-term effects of viewing operations on wildlife.

F) Implement recommendations from public planning efforts that pertain to watchable wildlife (e.g. the Kenai and Kodiak Brown Bear plans and the Anchorage "Living with Wildlife" plan).

G) Initiate new small-scale watchable wildlife programs in problem areas and locations that are identified by needs assessments (e.g. Chilkoot river).

H) Produce road & trail signs that describe wildlife habitats and species.

I) Provide adequate physical space and displays to assist the wildlife viewing public at area offices and other visitor centers (e.g. Palmer office).

J) Provide enhanced printed, television, radio, web information to the public on wildlife viewing opportunities.

K) Provide technical assistance and funding (e.g. grants, contracts) to communities and non-profit groups to identify and implement locally important watchable wildlife programs.

Level III Funding

Level III reflects the anticipated funding situation with "CARA Grande" – approximately $15 million additional. This listing assumes continued funding for Level I and Level II projects, including enhancements where appropriate. Level III projects are not listed in priority or sequential order.

      A) Create and fund Watchable Wildlife positions in selected area offices.

      B) Coordinate with the Alaska Department of Transportation to identify, plan, establish, and maintain roadside pullouts in areas that provide wildlife or important habitat viewing opportunities.

      C) Consider new large-scale watchable wildlife programs that are identified by needs assessment.

      D) Develop an interactive watchable wildlife database and make it available to the public on the web and at kiosks in major airports and visitor centers.

      E) Evaluate regulations that pertain to wildlife viewing and propose new regulations if necessary to protect the resources.

      F) Hire seasonal staff at appropriate refuges, Critical Habitat Areas, and other special areas (e.g. Potter Marsh and Creamer's Field) to lead nature walks for the public.

      G) Complete the Potter Marsh project as currently proposed (Bird Treatment and Learning Center [TLC], visitor center, expanded boardwalk, and marsh enhancements).

      H) Acquire lands and/or access to important wildlife viewing areas if current landowners are willing to sell or donate lands or easements.

Organizational Structure

Proposed new staff for developing a solid, integrated Watchable Wildlife program include: one (1) Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator; four (4) Regional Watchable Wildlife Specialists; Area Watchable Wildlife Specialists as needed; one (1) additional Round Island Technician; one (1) Kodiak Bear Viewing Technician; two (2) staff for Potter Marsh; two (2) more Creamer's Field Technicians; and an undetermined number of Administrative staff.

Two basic organizational approaches for Watchable Wildlife were discussed: 1) a separate, centralized Watchable Wildlife program, under a Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator, who would supervise Regional Watchable Wildlife Specialists directly; and

2) a fully integrated program, with Regional Watchable Wildlife Specialists directly supervised by existing Regional Supervisors, and Area Watchable Wildlife Specialists supervised by Area Biologists.

The group agreed to support, with reservations, a phased approach beginning with a centralized effort to get the program off the ground. Then over 3 to 5 years transition into the second phase of integrating the Watchable Wildlife program into the regions, and perhaps no longer needing a Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator. In general, most of the Work Group supported the integrated approach to getting Watchable Wildlife programs established and managed at the regional level, with perhaps "dotted line" ties to a Statewide Coordinator to help with the building and maintaining of Watchable Wildlife program integrity.

Watchable Wildlife Work Group Recommendations

Introduction

The charge to the *Watchable Wildlife Work Group* was to identify and prioritize watchable wildlife needs and resources, outline strategies for providing them, and estimate human and monetary costs associated with providing them. The group focused on internal perspectives and recommendations (i.e., within the department), but also took into account the results of the June 27, 2001 public scoping session. We identified additional external sources for future input where appropriate in the project statements (i.e., public individuals or NGOs).

The following DWC staff members were selected by the DMT as members of the Watchable Wildlife Work Group:

John Crouse, Howard Golden, Polly Hessing, Thomas McDonough, Doreen Parker McNeill (co-chair), Michelle Sydeman, Larry VanDaele (co-chair); DMT members: John Coady and Steve Schwartz. Tommy Shropshire facilitated the process. Jim Schwarber was recorder.

The watchable wildlife strategic planning process began with a joint session with the Non-game and the Existing Management and Research workgroups. We reviewed the DWC mission, goals, and vision, and the strategic planning process. The joint session identified internal strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats to accomplishing the divisions mission and the DMT's charges to our workgroups. We then broke into our respective workgroups.

The Watchable Wildlife Workgroup briefly identified the internal strengths and weaknesses, and external opportunities and threats for Watchable Wildlife from the larger list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats generated from the combined session of the Watchable Wildlife, Non-game, and Existing Research and Management workgroups (Appendix B). We concluded that most, if not all, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats applied to Watchable Wildlife. We then laid out our agenda for the next 4 ½ days. We decided on the following schedule:
- Identify strategic Watchable Wildlife issues
- Identify goals
- Identify current decision-making process (joint session with Non-game, and Existing Research and Management workgroups)
- Identify criteria for prioritizing projects
- Identify projects
- Prioritize projects
- Develop project.

During the process we referred often to the Watchable Wildlife Workgroup Charter and the DMT's charge to the *Watchable Wildlife Work Group* to identify and prioritize watchable wildlife needs and resources, outline strategies for providing them, and estimate human and monetary costs associated with providing them.

Strategic Issues generation began with an open discussion about watchable wildlife: what it is, what's going on in the state, and the DWC's role. Current programs are: McNeil River, Round Island, Pack Creek, Potter's Marsh, Creamer's Field, and Mendenhall wetlands. The following is a list of items discussed.

- What is watchable wildlife? Some not familiar with subject.
- Just a single "snapshot" from this group – part of eventual whole.
- Develop programs we can enjoy and learn from; e.g., Round Island for 4 days
- People become "ambassadors" for the ecosystem.
- Both sanctioned and unsanctioned activities occur.
- Conflicts with tourism maps pointing people to Taylor Highway in hunting season
- Bow-hunters along Dalton Highway vs. tourists
- Need for education – overlap of Information and Education (I&E) programs, with Watchable Wildlife
- "Timing and zoning" to accommodate hunting vs. viewers in Kodiak Plan
- Issues: safety and viewing; habituation of bears; guidelines and ethics [chasing whales]
- Pressure from tourism industry to use CARA funding for more viewing opportunities
- May need more regulations for Watchable Wildlife [is a consumptive issue]
- Need to stop unmanaged areas; Wolverine Creek has many sport fishers and numerous bears; mixed messages to bears & people…
- Planning helped resolve potential conflict on Kodiak with watchable vs. hunting.
- Important to link education with formal viewing areas/use. Habitat importance
- Helicopter viewing of bears on tidal flats
- Helicopter glacier tours harassing goats
- Peer pressure in small towns an answer to abuse of wildlife tour operators
- Educate viewers and operators
- Who should manage wildlife viewing? DWC as they do for hunting? Parks role? Partner role?
- ** DWC needs to have a more active role in managing and promoting viewing: group felt it's consistent with DWC Mission.

After reviewing the above discussion, we generated a list of 41 issues relative to watchable wildlife, and grouped them into 5 categories.

Strategic Watchable Wildlife Issues

A: **Marketing, Public Relations, Promotion, and Credibility with the wildlife viewing public**

- Develop better relations with the wildlife viewing public
- Provide a full-spectrum (wide-range) of wildlife viewing opportunities
- Identify which species to promote and not-to-promote for wildlife viewing
- Market our wildlife viewing opportunities
- Provide habitat protection – Identify impact of wildlife viewing on habitat
- Provide opportunities
- Identify role of non-resident tourists in our wildlife viewing process
- Provide realistic expectations for wildlife viewers
- Make Alaska the world class wildlife viewing state that it can be

B: **Quality Control, Administration/Operation**
- Control commercialization of wildlife viewing
- Measure the wildlife viewing impact on small communities – rural residents
- Connect wildlife viewing with the economy
- Monitoring the effects of viewing on wildlife
- Improve the ethics of wildlife viewers
- Provide sustainable wildlife viewing opportunities
- Prevent conditioning of wildlife by people
- Identify geographic areas that we do not want to draw attention to
- Improve public safety
- Improve wildlife safety
- Emphasize law enforcement as a tool for managing wildlife viewing opportunities (trespassing, litter)
- Provide adequate staff and money

C: **Outreach, sociological, and political considerations**
- Communicate with the Legislature and other agencies
- Prevent disenfranchising our traditional constituency:
- Get public support

D: **Partnerships, cultural and corporate**
- Identify the subsistence value vs. wildlife viewing conflicts
- Work with rural communities as they desire to do wildlife-viewing projects
- Identify wildlife viewing stakeholders
- How should we consider partnerships with federal agencies, private organizations, Native entities, etc.?

E: **Product Definition – defining watchable wildlife**
- Define a successful wildlife viewing experience

- Improve our knowledge of wildlife viewing opportunities
- Manage access
- Manage user conflicts (watching vs. hunting/helicopters/boats)
- Solicit from the public their expectations concerning wildlife viewing
- Provide wildlife viewing opportunities for everybody (across all economic classes)
- Coordinate with wildlife management practices (internal and external)
- Identify our role in wildlife viewing – relation to external stakeholders
- Identify our opportunities for partnering with other stakeholders
- Identify what should be measured and how --- to determine the worth of wildlife viewing
- Make sure that wildlife viewing opportunities have an educational component
- Strive for an ecosystem approach rather than a species approach to wildlife viewing
- Address predator/prey relationships in wildlife viewing

Watchable Wildlife Goals

With the DWC mission, goals, and vision statements in mind, we analyzed the issue categories to produce the following watchable wildlife goal statements:

1. **Ensure that wildlife-viewing opportunities do not adversely affect wildlife or their habitat.**
2. **Promote responsible wildlife viewing behavior.**
3. **Provide high quality information to the public to enhance their appreciation of wildlife viewing and commitment to wildlife and habitat conservation.**
4. **Provide a wide range of safe, educational and sustainable wildlife viewing opportunities.**
5. **Minimize conflicts between wildlife viewing and other wildlife users and landowners.**
6. **Promote wildlife viewing that is sensitive to local needs and desires.**
7. **Create partnerships that promote quality wildlife viewing experiences.**

We recognize DWC's responsibility to be the leader in Watchable Wildlife. The welfare of wildlife and habitat is the highest priority; as well as building commitment to conservation. Public education is central to attaining these goals.

Projects

Using our goal statements as guidance, we identified a list of 51 watchable wildlife projects. The workgroup first attempted to prioritize the project list by designating them as maintenance and operations projects; enhancements; new and capital improvements; and new projects (Appendix C.) A few projects were deleted from further prioritization during the process in Appendix C (noted by striking through the item) because the group felt they were too broad, addressed in other listed projects, or otherwise not applicable for consideration *at this time*. The second prioritization effort grouped the projects into 5 program categories: site development, enhancement and capital improvements; information and education; new staff; implementation of existing plan recommendations; and interagency coordination (Appendix D.) The third prioritization attempt used Chicago style voting to prioritize the projects. This broke projects into 2 groups: more than 1 vote and 1 vote (Appendix E). Projects that did not get a vote are not listed. The group reached no consensus on any of these prioritization methods, and there was much discussion about how each method did not highlight the importance of funding many projects we agreed were important. These prioritization attempts enabled us to discuss projects, making final prioritization and details more productive.

The workgroup settled on prioritizing the projects by categorizing them into 3 funding levels: current DWC funding (Level I), CARA light funding (Level II), and full CARA funding (Level III). Projects placed in level I were deemed so important to the Watchable Wildlife program that they should be funded even if no new funding source is available to the division. Level II funding projects are very important, but need more resources. Level III funding projects are *either* of lesser importance than levels 1 and 2 *or* required very large amounts of funding. As a group, we were satisfied with this type of prioritization, which included some prioritization within the 3 categories. For each prioritized project, we developed a problem statement, possible solution, considerations, cost, staffing, and method of evaluation (Appendix A)

Level I Funding

The Level I funding category reflects the current funding situation with no additional monies. Projects A and B are the highest priorities for Watchable Wildlife funding. Other Level I projects are not listed in priority or sequential order.

> A) Maintain existing Watchable Wildlife Programs (including McNeil River, Round Island, Pack Creek, and Creamer's Field).

> B) Create and fund a Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator position.

> C) Produce high-quality publications (both print and electronic) on responsible wildlife viewing behavior, Anchorage area wildlife viewing opportunities and Fairbanks area wildlife viewing opportunities.

D) Consider recommendations from public planning efforts that pertain to watchable wildlife (i.e. the Kenai and Kodiak Brown Bear plans and the Anchorage "Living with Wildlife" plan).

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B) Conduct a "needs assessment" of the publics' desires for future watchable wildlife programs.

C) Enhance existing watchable wildlife programs (McNeil River, Round Island, Pack Creek and Creamers Field).

D) Develop and implement a training program for wildlife viewing operators in coordination with the Watchable Wildlife Steering Committee.

E) Develop and implement research programs which investigate the immediate and long-term effects of viewing operations on wildlife.

F) Implement recommendations from public planning efforts that pertain to watchable wildlife (e.g. the Kenai and Kodiak Brown Bear plans and the Anchorage "Living with Wildlife" plan).

G) Initiate new small-scale watchable wildlife programs in problem areas and locations that are identified by needs assessments.

H) Produce road & trail signs that describe wildlife habitats and species.

I) Provide adequate physical space and displays to assist the wildlife viewing public at area offices and other visitor centers.

J) Provide enhanced printed, TV, radio, web information to the public on WV opportunities.

K) Provide technical assistance and funding (e.g. grants, contracts) to communities and non-profit groups to identify and implement locally important watchable wildlife programs.

Level III Funding

Level III reflects the anticipated funding situation with "CARA Grande" – approximately $15 million additional. This listing assumes continued funding for Level I and Level II projects, including enhancements where appropriate. Level III projects are not listed in priority or sequential order.

A) Create and fund Watchable Wildlife positions in selected area offices.

B) Coordinate with the Alaska Department of Transportation to identify, plan, establish, and maintain roadside pullouts in areas that provide wildlife or important habitat viewing opportunities.

C) Consider new large-scale watchable wildlife programs that are identified by needs assessment.

D) Develop an interactive watchable wildlife database and make it available to the public on the web and at kiosks in major airports and visitor centers.

E) Evaluate regulations that pertain to wildlife viewing and propose new regulations if necessary to protect the resources.

F) Hire seasonal staff at appropriate refuges, Critical Habitat Areas, and other special areas (e.g. Potter Marsh and Creamer's Field) to lead nature walks for the public.

G) Complete the Potter Marsh project as currently proposed (Bird TLC, visitor center, expanded boardwalk, and marsh enhancements).

H) Acquire lands and/or access to important wildlife viewing areas if current landowners are willing to sell or donate the lands or easements.

Organizational Structure

The Work Group first listed existing staff in Watchable Wildlife type programs, then listed proposed new staff identified during this week's strategic planning session for Watchable Wildlife. Other non-traditional program staff suggestions from other Workgroups were taken into consideration, such as "Non-game Coordinator." Existing

staff in Watchable Wildlife include 2 at McNeil, 1 at Round Island, 2 Creamer's Field staff, 1 non-game coordinator, and 1 Special Area Coordinator.

Proposed new staff for developing a solid, integrated Watchable Wildlife program include: one (1) Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator; four (4) Regional Watchable Wildlife Specialists; Area Watchable Wildlife Specialists as needed; one (1) additional Round Island Technician; one (1) Kodiak Bear Viewing Technician; two (2) staff for Potter Marsh; two (2) more Creamer's Field Technicians; and an undetermined number of administrative staff.

Two basic organizational approaches for Watchable Wildlife were discussed: 1) a separate, centralized Watchable Wildlife program, under a Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator, who would supervise Regional Watchable Wildlife Specialists directly; and 2) a fully integrated program, with Regional Watchable Wildlife Specialists directly supervised by existing Regional Supervisors, and Area Watchable Wildlife Specialists supervised by Area Biologists.

Risks of building a separate, central Watchable Wildlife program include failure to integrate Watchable Wildlife into the Division of Wildlife Conservation, and more vulnerability to being eliminated or reduced. A risk to fully integrating Watchable Wildlife program components into the existing DWC structure is reduced emphasis and lack of support for Watchable Wildlife.

The strengths for building a centralized Watchable Wildlife program include giving it full attention with a high-level Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator, perhaps at the Assistant Director level, to help promote the program. A decentralized program, integrated into the DWC, would better serve the goal of making the DWC "a full-service organization."

The group then considered and agreed to support, with some reservations, a phased approach beginning with a centralized effort in getting the program off the ground, and then over 3 to 5 years transition into the second phase of integrating the Watchable Wildlife program into the regions, and perhaps no longer needing a Statewide Watchable Wildlife Coordinator.

Concerns to making a phased approach successful include the changing responsibilities and position description for a Statewide Coordinator - from supervisor of 4 Regional Watchable Wildlife Specialists to none, and adding program components and responsibilities to both the Regional Supervisor and Area Biologist levels as part of the transition.

In general, most of the Workgroup supported the integrated approach to getting Watchable Wildlife programs established and managed at the regional level, with perhaps "dotted line" ties to a Statewide Coordinator to help with the building and maintaining of Watchable Wildlife program integrity.